

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13
TRSE-00 /063 W
-----171138Z 037679 /11

O R 171036Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6188
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, IS
SUBJECT: POLLING BEGINS; AN ELECTION FORECAST

BEGIN SUMMARY: AS VOTING GETS UNDERWAY TODAY, THE OUT-
LOOK STILL REMAINS UNCERTAIN. LIKE OTHERS, WE FORESEE
A SLIM ALIGNMENT LEAD OVER THE LIKUD, BUT THE LARGE
UNDECIDED VOTE THAT APPEARED IN MOST RECENT POLLS MAKES
ANY PREDICTION RISKY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE KNESSET CAMPAIGN CLOSED YESTERDAY WITH A FINAL
FLURRY OF PARTY ACTIVITY. AS VOTERS GO TO THE POLLS
TODAY (SOME 80 PERCENT PARTICIPATION OF THE 2.2 MILLION
ELIGIBLE VOTERS IS EXPECTED) THE COUNTRY IS ON A
SEMI-HOLIDAY BASIS. THE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE MOBILIZED
THEIR VOLUNTEERS TO GET OUT THE VOTE AND THE EGGED BUS
COMPANY IS PROVIDING FREE TRANSPORTATION. THE 3380
POLLING PLACES, WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS, WILL BE OPEN
FROM 7 A.M. TO 11 P.M.

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2. THE PARTIES WENT ALL OUT IN CAMPAIGNING ON THE
FINAL WEEKEND. ADDRESSING A HUGE GATHERING IN
LOD, HOME OF ISRAEL AIRCRAFT INDUSTRIES, PERES
RAN INTO A BARRAGE OF LIKUD HECKLING. HE
DEFTLY TURNED ASIDE THEIR INTERRUPTIONS WITH
WISECRACK RETORTS OF HIS OWN. BEGIN SPOKE

BEFORE MASS RALLIES IN JERUSALEM AND TEL AVIV,
DEMONSTRATING HIS OLD FORM, APPARENTLY NONE THE
WORSE FOR HIS RECENT HEART ATTACK.

3. ALTHOUGH ELECTIONEERING CONTINUED ON MAY 16,
THE ANTICIPATED CLIMAX CAME SUNDAY NIGHT (MAY 15)
WITH THE LONG AWAITED PERES-BEGIN TV DEBATE--
THE FIRST EVER BETWEEN ASPIRANTS FOR THE PREMIER-
SHIP. BOTH WERE IN GOOD FORM, BOTH REHASHED
WELL-KNOWN POSITIONS, BUT NEITHER DEMONSTRATED
FLASHES OF BRILLIANCE--NOR DID EITHER COMMIT
ANY GAFFES. BEGIN NEEDLED PERES BY QUOTING FROM
HIS OLD STATEMENTS TO SHOW THAT PERES' POSITION
DIFFERED LITTLE FROM THE LIKUD'S. PERES REMAINED
UNRUFFLED. THE DEBATE WAS SEEN AS PRETTY MUCH
OF A DRAW AND PROBABLY HAD MINIMAL EFFECT ON
PERSUADING VOTERS. AS ONE COMMUNICATIONS EXPERT
PUT IT, ELECTION DEBATES CAN SOMETIMES HELP
UNKNOWN CANDIDATES, BUT SUNDAY'S PERFORMERS
HARDLY FELL INTO THAT CATEGORY. THE FACT THAT
PERES AGREED TO DEBATE WAS SOMETHING OF A VICTORY
FOR BEGIN SINCE IT TENDED TO LEGITIMIZE THE
LIKUD'S CLAIM TO BE A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE
ALIGNMENT. BEN GURION, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD NEVER
DEIGNED TO ENTER PUBLIC DEBATE WITH BEGIN
OR ANY OTHER RIVAL.

4. AS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, THE CAMPAIGN WAS
NOTABLE FOR THE ABSENCE OF SERIOUS DISCUSSION
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OF ISSUES. WHILE IT DID TAKE ON SOME EXCITEMENT
TOWARD THE END WITH A FEW LARGE RALLIES AND THE
INTENSIFICATION OF CAMPAIGN EFFORTS, IT WAS
GENERALLY A DULL AFFAIR. PERHAPS THE BIGGEST
FACTOR IN INFLUENCING THE ELECTORATE'S THINKING
IN THE FINAL DAYS WAS LESS THE CAMPAIGN ITSELF
THAN PERCEIVED TRENDS IN WASHINGTON'S THINKING
ON MIDDLE EAST ISSUES.

5. ANY ATTEMPT TO ESTIMATE THE OUTCOME IS
HAMPERED BY THE LARGE UNDECIDED SEGMENT OF
VOTERS REFLECTED IN MOST POLLS. IF A PARTICULAR
TREND AWAY FROM OR TOWARD THE ALIGNMENT DEVELOPS
WITHIN THIS SEGMENT, THE CONVENTIONAL WISDOM
AMONG SEASONED OBSERVERS, WHICH GIVES THE
ALIGNMENT A NARROW VICTORY, COULD BE WRONG.
DEPENDING ON THE TREND'S DIRECTION, THE
ALIGNMENT COULD COME IN SECOND OR, ON THE OTHER
HAND, DO SURPRISINGLY WELL. HOWEVER, THE

GENERAL EXPECTATION REMAINS THAT THE ALIGNMENT WILL SUFFER SOME EROSION AND THAT MOST OF THIS LOST GROUND WILL BE ABSORBED BY THE DMC, WHICH WILL ALSO PICK UP VOTES THAT HAD PREVIOUSLY GONE TO THE ILP AND SHULAMIT ALONI. THE DMC WILL ALSO GET A SMALL PART OF THE LIKUD VOTE--AT LEAST THAT PORTION OF THE LIKUD VOTERS WHO HAD SUPPORTED THE FREE CENTER IN THE 1973 ELECTION WHEN IT WAS PART OF THE LIKUD.

6. WE AGREE WITH THIS ESTIMATE AND THE BELIEF THAT THE TYPICAL VOTER OF ALIGNMENT BACKGROUND WHO MAY STILL BE UNDECIDED WILL AT THE MOMENT OF TRUTH STICK WITH HIS PARTY. BASED ON THIS, OUR GUESS IS THE ALIGNMENT TOTAL WILL BE IN THE LOW FORTIES; THE LIKUD WILL ABOUT HOLD ITS OWN (MINUS THE TWO FREE CENTER SEATS); DMC--12 TO 15; NRP-- LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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9 OR 10; AGUDAH PARTIES--5; SHELLI--THREE OR FOUR; ILP--ONE OR TWO; UNITED ARAB LIST--ONE OR TWO; RAKAH--SIX OR SEVEN; AND ANY ONE OR MORE OF THE FOLLOWING MAY PICK UP A SEAT: CITIZENS RIGHTS, SHLOMZION, BEN-PORAT AND FLATTO-SHARON.

7. THUS, ALTHOUGH WE THINK THE ALIGNMENT WILL WIN A SMALL PLURALITY, IT WOULD HARDLY BE ABLE TO TAKE MUCH SATISFACTION IN SUCH A "VICTORY." AT BEST IT WOULD FACE A DIFFICULT TIME OF HARD BARGAINING TO PUT TOGETHER A COALITION UNDER ITS CONTROL. WITH A MARGIN OF FIVE TO SEVEN SEATS IT COULD WELL FACE THE CHOICE OF SHARING POWER WITH THE LIKUD OR GOING INTO OPPOSITION.
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Message Attributes

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Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 17-May-1977 12:00:00 am
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
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